DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 449 156 SP 039 740

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TITLE Methods Courses, So What? Preliminary Findings of a Longitudinal Study.
PUB DATE 2000-12-00
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference (Phoenix, AZ, December 2000).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Beginning Teachers; Culturally Relevant Education; Disabilities; Diversity (Faculty); Diversity (Student); Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Faculty Development; Higher Education; *Literacy Education; Longitudinal Studies; *Methods Courses; Preservice Teacher Education; *Self Efficacy; *Student Development; Student Teachers; Student Teaching; Teacher Improvement

ABSTRACT

This study examined influences that preservice literacy teacher education courses and sustained relationships with literacy researchers had on the literacy practices of three preservice teachers during student teaching and their subsequent self-efficacy and performance as literacy teachers during their first teaching years. Data collected during students' literacy methods courses, at their student teaching sites, and early in the first teaching year included: class projects from literacy methods courses; self-evaluations from those courses; interviews; classroom visits during student and beginning teaching; post-visit interviews; focus groups; journals; and research team meeting notes. The research team included four literacy education faculty members. These new teachers faced sources of knowledge that included their pasts as students, their student teaching placement, and what the research team offered them. They began to believe they were smart about their classrooms, and they could increasingly construct curriculum rooted in their students' needs. Their move away from being receivers of teaching knowledge to being constructors of such knowledge was tentative. Their constructing of teaching identities seemed rooted in the collaborative context of sustained relationships with each other and the researchers. Their identities were influenced by the shifting status of others' knowledge, as they learned that the researchers and cooperating teachers did not have the blueprint for teaching knowledge specific to their teaching contexts. (Contains 26 references.) (SM)

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Methods Courses, So What? Preliminary Findings of a Longitudinal Study

Running Head: Methods Courses, So What?

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ED 449 156

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference, Phonenix, Arizona, December, 2000.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to increase our understanding of the influences that preservice teacher education courses and sustained relationships with literacy researchers have on the practices of preservice teachers and their subsequent self-efficacy and performance as inservice teachers of reading during the first three to five years of their practice. The ultimate goals of the study are to enhance teacher practice, student learning, and the pedagogy of the researchers in teaching preservice literacy methods courses.

Literacy Methods Courses, So What? Preliminary Findings of a Longitudinal Study

The purpose of this longitudinal cross case study (Stake, 1995) is to increase our understanding of the influences that preservice literacy teacher education courses and sustained relationships with literacy researchers have on the literacy practices of preservice teachers during their student teaching and their subsequent self-efficacy and performance as inservice teachers of literacy during the first five years of their practice. The ultimate goals of the study are to enhance teacher practice, student learning, and the pedagogy of the researchers in teaching preservice literacy methods courses. Consistent with Alvermann's (1990) call for a closer look at the dichotomous differences between expert and novice teachers of reading, the present study seeks to understand the growth of teachers from novice to expert in ways that complicate the dichotomy suggested by Alvermann. The study is rooted in the premises that there is no single line which teachers cross in establishing themselves as experts and that the field of literacy teacher education will be served well by close examination of beginning teachers' development.

This study began with discussions among the literacy education faculty of a preservice teacher preparation program at a large university in the southwest United States. The faculty agreed upon six goals for literacy methods courses. The goals focused on: 1) presenting a variety of philosophical approaches; 2) accommodating diverse students; 3) addressing students with special needs; 4) assessing literacy; 5) understanding home, school and community and 6) applying state and national standards. Each

faculty member committed to basing their courses in deepening students' and our own understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-billings, 1994) and community funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992).

In this article, we present three cases. Cases #1 and #2 focus on students with teaching licenses in elementary or elementary/bilingual education. These students enrolled in student teaching concurrently with methods courses, and took four methods courses, a seminar, and student teaching (2 days/week) during their first professional semester. Their second professional semester involved two methods courses, seminar, and student teaching four days per week. They are presently in their first year of teaching. Case #3 is a preservice teacher enrolled in a two-year dual license program who will have the opportunity to graduate with a B.S in education and majors in elementary and special education. During the first year, known as the preresidency component, most courses are taught as traditional stand alone courses with the exception of oral and written language and a reading methods courses that are team taught in conjunction with a special education field experience. During the senior year residency component, students complete 18 credit hours of student teaching and 16 credits of coursework. The student teaching occurs three days a week in the fall and four days a week in the spring.

Related Research

The development of goals, commitment to democracy in education, and ongoing conversations among the researchers, among the study participants, and between researchers and study participants underscore the collaborative nature of this work.

Sustained Collaborations

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Recent studies examined the attitudes and beliefs of teachers of reading and worked to inform them of research-supported strategies (Richardson, 1996). Other studies engaged in ongoing interviews and observations of new teachers for as long as a year (Mallette & Readence, 1999). Still, there remains a relative dearth of studies that involve sustained relationships between literacy instructors/researchers and inchoate teachers. This is not surprising considering the complicated nature of a collaborative study in which new teachers support each other, researchers support new teachers, and ongoing conversations endeavor to enhance the practices of the researchers (as teachers of methods courses) and the new teachers (as teachers of literacy). We frame the study in Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the zone of proximal development and view the zone as relational (Goldstein, 1999), having the potential for sustained involvement provided that those involved wish to sustain the relationship. Collaborative zones involve "the lowering of boundaries of self," careful listening, and "joint purpose" (John-Steiner, 2000, pp. 184-184) and are a place for "being in, being for, and being with" (Moustakas, 19**) as roles in the zone shift to address emerging interests and needs of all of the study participants.

Hoffmann and Pearson (2000) propose that the development of teachers of reading needs to be based in *teaching* teachers, not training them. Such teaching relates to Dewey's (1938) notions of educative experiences and continuity when the learning about teaching is contextualized (in the teachers' classrooms and minds and with other new teachers) and sustained over time. Putnam and Borko (2000) refer to this as the "situative perspective" (p. 12) because "learning and knowing are situated" (p. 13) in

relationships, settings, issues of culture, language, and other facets of context. Knowledge construction changes across contexts and relationships, which makes the construction situational and tentative. This means that content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986) are situative and that for methods courses to become educative a sustained relationship across contexts may best support teachers' efficacy in literacy education. This may help explain why some students who do well in our methods courses enter the field of teaching and report to us that they do not know how to teach reading. They may have known within the context of the course, but in the contexts of their classrooms, their knowing changed to a sentiment of not knowing.

Constructivism and Teacher Knowledge

Discussions of constructivism are saturated with Vygotksy's ideas (see Phillips, 2000), yet the term 'constructivism' is not clearly defined and has "few agreed upon characteristics" (Richardson, 1999, p. 145). Relying upon participants' narrative (stories about teaching) construction of their teaching minds suggests that constructivism involves observing, discussing, analyzing, presenting, and representing. The practical knowledge that new teachers have may not be visible (Elbaz, 1981) even to themselves and may not be visible to researchers until we stop "telling teachers" what we know (Hollingsworth, 1992, p.375). Not being 'told' supports reflective practitioners (Schon, 1986) who are involved in ongoing and collaborative construction of teaching knowledge. At odds with that construction is the feeling of isolation new teachers report (Lortie, 1970) and the lonely life that one lives when constructing a teaching identity (Britzman, 1989). We

consider the zone of proximal teacher knowledge development as not only a cognitive place; its collaborative nature makes it an affective and relational place in which caring (Noddings, 19**) plays a role in knowledge construction. Knowledge construction is rooted in epistemological issues (Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) as new teachers and literacy researchers come to terms with the nature and sources of knowledge.

Method

Data was collected during participants' literacy methods courses, at their student teaching sites, and (for those employed) during the first months of their first year of teaching (fall, 2000). Data consisted of: class projects from literacy methods courses, self-evaluations from those courses, long interviews, classroom visits during student teaching and first-year teaching (participant observation [Spradley, 1980]), post-visit interviews, focus group discussions, researchers' journals, and notes on research team meetings. The research team consisted of four literacy education faculty members. Participants (pseudonyms) in each case are discussed in the case presentations, below.

Field notes were elaborated and interview and focus sessions were transcribed. Data analysis involved constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and thematic analyses (Spradley, 1980) of elaborated field notes, transcriptions, students' projects, and other narrative data. Themes were interpreted and qualitatively aggregated (Stake, 1997) across cases.

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Three Cases

Case #1

This case focuses on four teachers in their first year of teaching. I (Researcher #1) was their reading methods instructor and observed them in methods class, during student teaching, and teaching in their own classrooms. I interviewed them following those visits. As new teachers, they attended focus group meetings every three weeks. Monica is a bilingual Hispanic woman who was an educational assistant (paraprofessional) at a bilingual school for 20 years before completing the teacher education program. She student taught in a bilingual kindergarten and secured a job in a bilingual kindergarten in an area of the city she referred to as "the war zone." Sylvia, also a bilingual Hispanic woman, student taught in first grade in a working class neighborhood in a monolingual English classroom and secured a job in a monolingual English classroom in which half of her students speak Spanish. Annie and Pam, both white women, student taught in a middle class white neighborhood in first and second grade (respectively) at a monolingual English school. Annie secured a first grade teaching position at the same school as Sylvia. Pam secured a second grade teaching job in a wealthy white neighborhood. All secured positions at the same grade levels at which they student taught.

As preservice teachers, their course projects, commitment to completing all readings and assignments, and class participation suggested that they would be effective and well-organized teachers. For example, their Literacy Action Plan assignments contained ideas about arrangement of furniture, use of time, organization of their reading programs, and specific strategies for

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meeting the needs of diverse learners. Their understanding of the reading process was evidenced by successfully completing Procedure III of the Reading Miscue Inventory (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987) and developing a plan of teaching for a case study of a child.

In methods class discussions following the preservice students' first classroom visit to the site of their student teaching, they complained about a variety of facets of their cooperating teachers' classrooms. They did not like the rigidity of the reading programs that were being instituted. In the classrooms in which systematic direct intense instruction in phonics was being instituted, they were concerned that they did not understand phonics well enough to teach it to children. Many of their concerns became the focus of the reading methods course.

By their third week of student teaching, a dramatic shift was noted. Pam, Annie, and Sylvia became increasingly familiar with the routines of their cooperating teachers and began establishing personal relationships with the children. They reported that the various basal and other systematic programs in use helped to keep the classrooms orderly and well organized. They reported finding the reading methods course interesting, but referred to methods courses as "theory" that was not useful in their classrooms. These preservice teachers appropriated and gave more credence to the strategies for literacy instruction that they experienced in their cooperating classrooms than to those presented in methods class. Monica did not agree with her colleagues. She found the routines they described as stifling to children, boring for her, and not culturally relevant, referring to her reading of Ladson-Billings (1994). The others were resistant to culturally relevant

pedagogy, feeling that Ladson-Billings accused them of insensitivity to cultural differences. Sylvia found the second semester of student teaching quite uncomfortable. She attributed the discomfort to coming to terms with culturally relevant pedagogy and her own past as an Hispanic woman. She reported that as she made sense of her identity, she enhanced relationships with her students and their families.

Moving into their first year of teaching, the first round of classroom observations and the first focus group suggested that the new teachers tried to recreate their student teaching classrooms in their own classrooms. They asked their principals to order materials they used as student teachers or purchased those materials themselves. Sylvia, Pam, and Annie arranged their furniture in identical ways to their cooperating classrooms. However, following classroom observations, in focus group discussions, and during interviews, they noticed students were bored, others misbehaved or would not complete their assignments, and some did not appear to be learning to read. When questions arose in their practice, they did not draw upon learning from methods classes: class notes, readings from the classes, or the many writing assignments completed during the methods semester. Annie said, "I don't know what to do about my reading program." When asked about strategies and organization of reading programs that were presented in methods class, she said, "That was just a class. Now I need to know what to do." In subsequent focus group settings and interviews following classroom observations, I reminded the new teachers of some of the methods course contents about the teaching and suggested that in focus groups they could rely upon each other.

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The new teachers reported feeling isolated and found the focus sessions an opportunity to discuss critical issues that arose in their teaching. Following the second and third rounds of observations and the third focus group session, there was a shift again as the new teachers began to make decisions about their teaching. They moved away from what they learned by complying in their cooperating teachers' classrooms. The move towards compliance may have been a temporary way of composing a tentative teaching identity. During the first months of teaching, that tentative way of teaching got complicated quickly as the new teachers found themselves in more diverse and demanding circumstances than their student teaching afforded them. Together, they discussed lesson plans, unit plans, and strategies specific to particular students' needs. The focus groups and interviews were forums for honesty, caring, tears, reflection, and planning; they were forums for external speech involving rehashing about and rehearsing for practice. Coming to know how to teach, to this point, meant realizing that they have support, voice, information, and ripening knowledge that make them situationally wise and sufficiently knowledgeable to make pedagogical decisions.

Case #2

The students in this case study were part of the "Culture/Language/Diversity" cohort of 25 student teachers who were in my (Researcher #2) reading methods course during the first semester of their student teaching year. The six *latinas* in this study were selected because they discussed and utilized topics relating to their home culture in their university course assignments and in class; and were observed using their knowledge of their school children's communities in their preservice teaching

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to make connections to instructional concepts. These young women infused what I advocated as "culturally relevant" teaching/planning/pedagogy into their in-class/out-of-class course assignments. Some of the ways in which this type of pedagogy emerged in my data set were through the following focal course assignments: a) literacy autobiography; b) 3-week classroom observation focusing on cultural climate and on the literacy practices and discourse used by the cooperating teacher; c) thematic unit on a culturally relevant topic; d) shared/guided reading activities with multiethnic literature; and e) microethnographic case studies with emergent and "reluctant" readers. Each student teacher was placed in a low income school where over half of the school population was from homes where Spanish was spoken. Five of the student teachers were in elementary classrooms and one was in a middle school. Of the elementary teachers, two were seeking certification in bilingual education and were in such classrooms.

In this process of studying my own teaching in my methods course, I became interested in studying the following research questions: a) What role did I play in modeling culturally relevant pedagogy as evidenced in my course requirements/student projects and discourse?; and b) What was the nature of the literacy instruction used by my students in their classrooms at the Preservice and Inservice levels?

In terms of modeling culturally relevant pedagogy, one theme that emerged from the data gathered during the post-course focus group sessions, centered on how my discourse patterns were quite different from most of their other professors, who were not from a Spanish-speaking background. The students seemed to take their cues from me to know how to express themselves

in terms of their own performance in class. As Sharla had expressed, "We needed to know what code to use in class because we always get professors who want you to communicate the same way, like you are all White or something." In their schooling, my students reported that they rarely had the opportunity to use their community experiences, in terms of their ways of knowing and language usage, to illustrate their understanding in High School or in college. To them, I had modeled what was acceptable to talk about in class and how to communicate in terms of using Spanish and English in my own narratives, which included codeswitching and examples of lessons in Spanish. In addition, they focused on how I did not do "regular turn-taking" to control or lead classroom discourse but rather, I used a form of a "topic associating" style of communication as they had studied in our course readings with Au (1993). In my interpretation, all of these ways of interacting with them gave them the message that they were free to express themselves, as they desired while still completing their assignments. I fully expected them to use "real stories about their lives" to make sense of what they were experiencing with their readings or in their writing.

In terms of the nature of the literacy instruction used by my students in their Preservice teaching, I observed them using culturally relevant pedagogy through their selection of literature titles written by authors such as Gary Soto, Sandra Cisneros, Pat Mora, among others, for shared/guided reading assignments and for teaching their thematic units. They also took care to teach lessons on topics that they thought were culturally relevant to their children. Taking a critical stance in describing classroom and school practices with culturally and linguistically diverse learners, they made

individual efforts to correct some of the discriminatory practices that they were observing. They also went on extra home visits to learn about the children's literacy learning and home culture and attended community events to learn about their students' neighborhoods.

In their inservice teaching, my students took jobs in their own neighborhoods because of the great need they felt "to give back to the community" and because they knew they could "reach" the Hispanic students they were working with. When they began their school year, they sought help from me on an individual basis to help them teach reading to their culturally and linguistically diverse students. Belinda had specific questions about bilingualism and Laurel worried about her first grade reading scores on a standardized district test. During my visits to their classrooms, I noticed how they were teaching curricular topics that were relevant to their children and that their rooms were filled with multiethnic literature. I also saw how they were bringing in community members to their classroom to help with their teaching, this, they modeled after Moll's (1992) study with Mexican families in the southwest. Vivian and Paula took summer and night jobs in community centers to focus on literacy for Hispanic children in their neighborhoods and Carla is now the literacy leader at her school. Vivian has also taken on leading the Student Council in her middle school, which deals with topics related to graffiti, teen pregnancy, voting, equal rights, etc. These new teachers have also begun to call on one another to share ideas and resources for their teaching. They have formed a useful network among themselves and with other teachers, this is encouraging. They are taking care of their own needs while improving their instruction and mine.

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Case #3

Alanis is a 25-year-old student with severe disabilities. She describes herself as hard of hearing with a moderate to severe hearing loss in the speech range. She wears a hearing aid in both ears and uses an FM system in her university and school classrooms. She is a person with dyslexia, a learning disability in writing and scotopic sensitivity. She describes the dyslexia as a challenge in reading and understanding language. She views her difficulty in writing as thinking faster than she can write. She is effective in orally expressing her thoughts. Since the age of 12, when she learned that the challenges she experienced were identified as dyslexia, she developed strategies for reading and writing. She occasionally wears colored glasses and uses acetate transparencies as an overlay on written material. She tends to be self-conscious about the use of most of her adaptive devises and, in a desire to not draw attention to herself, does not often use them publicly.

Alanis is a senior who is presently student teaching in the residency year of the dual license program. The challenge for me (Researcher #3) is making what is preached about individuals with disabilities practicable in my own teaching. Ongoing mentoring and dialoguing with me during regular office hours across a one a half-year period developed into a collaborative research relationship. I was Alanis' literacy instructor in two courses (children's literature and oral and written language) during her presidency year. Alanis performed strongly with accommodations for additional time on written projects and an extensive reading log. Her work included a children's literature resource notebook that was thorough, reflective, and very well-organized. In her oral and written language course, she constructed five

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detailed and reflective biographic literacy profiles (Taylor, 1993): personal home, personal workplace, family of a child with disabilities, school, and community.

Alanis student taught in a general education a.m. and p.m. kindergarten in a middle class neighborhood for her first school-based experience. Her mentor, an experienced teacher, expressed enthusiasm and openness to mentoring a student teacher with a disability. She also valued strong speech and language modeling. The reading program being implemented was Saxon Phonics, systematic direct instruction in phonics. Alanis expressed ongoing dissatisfaction with the time consuming and decontextualized phonographic focus of the prescribed curriculum. She longed for the opportunity for her students to have time to read authentic texts, sing, and engage in more hands-on projects as she had experienced in her university coursework, an early childhood professional development workshop, and her mother's kindergarten classroom. Alanis successfully completed 10 days of required solo teaching.

What follows is excerpted from a collaboratively (Alanis and myself) constructed poetic synthesis of an incident that occurred during Alanis' first student teaching semester. It is her perspective of her experience and entitled I Have a Poem in My Body: A Poem in Two Voices. The themes of voice, marginalization, identity, overcoming obstacles, advocacy, creativity, and healing transformation had their basis in one of our weekly audio-taped and transcribed conversations and some subsequent creative writing that Alanis brought to the interview sessions. It is designed as a poem to be read in two voices. The voice in *italics* is Alanis' struggling voice; the other is her

powerful voice. The line "I AM A TEACHER" reconciles and unites the two voices and is read by both in unison.

Frustrated My mentor told me I need to work on my voice. Parents are saying the kids don't understand me.

Discouraged Fine. I know my voice is going to be the hardest thing to deal with. Maybe I'm not capable of teaching.

Supported My mentor also told me to never say that. She told me I'm capable of doing anything.

Cried I was teased in school and not comfortable with my voice….

Angered Why are people discouraging me from doing what I want to do in life?

…Changed I'm totally changing my whole outlook on life. No one has the right to tell me I can't do something because I have this or that.

Encouraged All I can do is keep going, just keep doing what I know I can do, and work on my voice. I am capable…

Created I want to write. I want to let people know what a teacher is about, who they really are I have a poem in my body that can't get out. I need someone to help bring it out.

Wondered Who am I as a teacher? I AM A TEACHER…

Learning … I am learning from my students, and they are learning from me. I AM A TEACHER…

… I'm a person I'm proud to be. I'm myself. YES! YES! I am! I am! I am one today! I AM A TEACHER

Alanis has developed a growing love of talking to people. She is more able to let others, particularly her students, know what her strengths and needs are. She credits the democratic valuing of voices, perspectives, and

collaboration in her university program, an intensive summer retreat, and sustained individual sessions with me for her transformation. One adaptive technique that she has found the most useful is the transcription of audio taped conversations, In this way, she can see and reflect upon the information and is able to write more effectively. Much to her surprise, she discovered a love for research from the perspective of the participant. Alanis feels empowered with something important to say. She is interested in continuing her education, learning sign language, and teaching the deaf and hard of hearing. Alanis' teaching and learning journey helps inform how well we are walking the talk of learner diversity in literacy education and unified (special and regular education) teacher preparation.

Cross Case Discussion

The new teachers were constructing their literacy teaching identities. Confronting issues of teaching, learning, curriculum, language, culture, and marginalization, they faced sources of knowledge that included their pasts as students in elementary schools, their student teaching placement, and what we offered them. They began to believe that they were smart about their classrooms and students and could increasingly construct curriculum rooted in their students' needs. The move away from being receivers of teaching knowledge to being constructors of such knowledge was tentative and far from linear as they asked us and each other what they were "supposed to do" in specific situations of literacy instruction. The constructing of their teaching identities seems rooted in the collaborative context afforded by sustained relationships with each other and us. Further, those identities are influenced by the shifting status of others' knowledge, as the new teachers

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learned that we and their cooperating teachers do not have the blueprint for teaching knowledge specific to their teaching contexts.

These preliminary findings are validating and challenging the implementation of democratic ideals, as role boundaries between faculty and students, expert and novice, are blurred and all students are given opportunities to have voice. This is also informing the design of the literacy courses to include more tools for peer collaboration and a more seamless alignment and integration of field experience and university coursework.

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